

For Farms and Gardens



A weekly column by

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DriftWatch.org a Useful Tool for Those Who Raise Bees and Specialty Crops

This weekend I attended the Northern Indiana Grazing Conference. I was helping people sign up for DriftWatch, a free online mapping service for those who raise sensitive crops like fruit, vegetables, and organically raised grains, pasture and hay, and bees.

Think of DriftWatch as a communication tool designed to help growers of sensitive specialty crops communicate with pesticide applicators. It is not a regulatory tool.

Specialty “crops” can include a wide variety of plants. Christmas trees, greenhouse, vegetables, tree fruit, grapes, hardwood trees, herbs, certified organic, land transitioning to organic, nursery crops, honey bees, and fish farms would be examples. In our area, many of the mapped fields are organic hay and pasture, used for grazing cows for organic dairy, beef or lamb production. Some of these crops can be valued at thousands of dollars per acre, so DriftWatch can save money by decreasing crop damage.

Growers and pesticide applicators can sign up at in.DriftWatch.org for no cost. You will create an account and provide common information about yourself (name and contact information). If you provide an email address, you can receive updates and notifications via email. If you have no email address, you can work with the Extension Office to create your entry.

Once your account is set up, producers can highlight the locations of their crops on a map. It is a fairly simple process. If you are familiar with Google Maps, you will find the mapping to be an easy exercise. When nearby pesticide applicators visit the site, they can look at fields they plan to spray and locate sensitive areas nearby.

There is no cost for pesticide applicators to participate. To use the site, pesticide applicators do not need an account. However, if applicators sign up for an account, they will receive emails when sensitive crops are added in their community. Many growers leave DriftWatch up on their

computer screens during the busy spray season, and they require their staff to check the maps before spraying is started.

The information that is added to DriftWatch is overseen by stewards who verify each mapped area that is submitted to the registry. The boundaries on the map are not property lines, but user-submitted sensitive area designations.

DriftWatch is not intended to be a registry for home gardens or for sites less than half an acre in size. Those entries are removed from the map by the steward.

The entries in DriftWatch are not permanent. Entries placed on the map are now good for 3 years. If they are not renewed, the entry is dropped from the map.

For those without internet access, who wish to map their sensitive crop or beehives, contact your local Extension office to make an appointment before the spray season begins. It generally takes 10 minutes to map a location. This is an activity that needs to be done in person, it cannot be done accurately over the phone.

